

Chew, Chew, Chew



Have you ever seen cows standing around chewing? Sometimes the cows will be eating grass, but most of the time, they are just chewing. When cattle are just chewing, it is called “chewing their cud.”

Cattle are a kind of animal called ruminants. Ruminants have four compartments to their very large stomach system. In fact, the largest stomach compartment in a cow is larger than your bathtub. It is necessary for the cow to have such a large stomach system because she has to eat so much. It is not unusual for a cow to eat 80 pounds of pasture grass every day! Other ruminants include sheep, goats and deer.

When a cow eats grass, she chews it only enough to be able to swallow it. Later, when she is at rest, muscles in her stomach will cause some of the food to come back up to her mouth so she can chew it some more (chewing her cud).

She may do this several times. Because of this unusual stomach system, cows can eat large amounts of grass or hay. However, it digests rather slowly. In fact, it sometimes takes three days for food to be digested by a cow.

The cow has very strong teeth so she can grind the grass or hay. However, she can't bite you because she does not have any top teeth in front. She only has bottom teeth in front. When the cow eats, she does not bite the grass. Instead, she tears the grass by grasping it in her mouth and then moving her head.

Not all farm animals are ruminants. A pig, for example, has a small stomach very much like ours. This means that pigs cannot digest hay very well, so farmers feed their pigs mainly grains such as corn and other feeds such as soybean meal. Pigs also chew their food more completely when they are eating. The pig will not be able to chew it again like a ruminant would.

Beef Math

1. A farmer has 50 cows. Three cows have twin calves. Two cows did not have calves. The rest of the cows had one calf each. How many calves are there?

2. A farmer has ten steers. Each steer should eat hay plus three pounds of grain each day. How many total pounds of grain should the farmer feed his steers today?

3. An acre is about the size of a football field. In much of Missouri, it takes about two acres of pasture for one cow. If a farmer has a 40 acre pasture, how many cows could be fed?

4. A regular sized square bale of hay weighs 60 pounds. If each steer needs ten pounds of hay today, how many steers can be fed with:

- a. 1 bale of hay?
- b. 2 bales of hay?
- c. 4 bales of hay?

5. A steer weighs 500 pounds. He sold it for 80 cents per pound. How many dollars did the steer sell for?

